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COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

July 13, 2001

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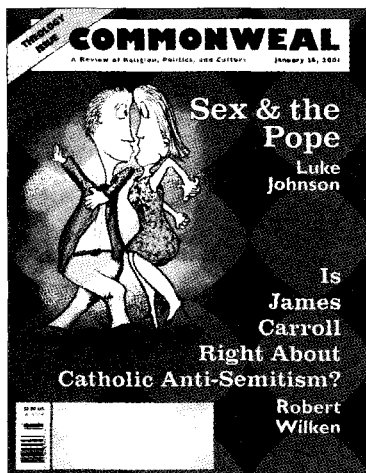
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COMMONWEAL

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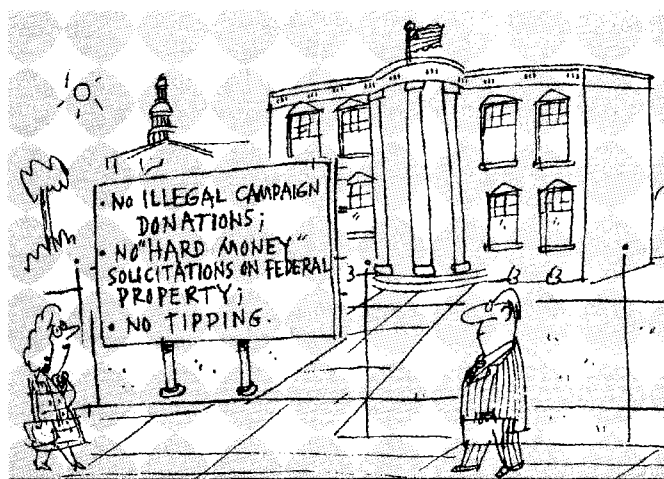
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To the Editors
Just infallible

Regarding Sidney Callahan's "The Pope Says!" (June 15), if the pope and the magisterium are infallible, then I am infallible if I agree with them. Not, perhaps, filled with love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, or self-control—just infallible.

WILLIAM M. PETERSEN
Summit, N.J.

Haight's evasions

Apropos of Robert Imbelli's June 15 letter and the editorial response, your readers should know that for over a decade very serious criticisms have been published in scholarly journals of Roger Haight's theological writings. To date he has failed to respond in print to these criticisms made by European and American theologians such as John Wright, Jean Galot, and Thomas Weinandy. Like some other popular Catholic theologians, Haight and his supporters preferred to ignore such criticisms. Finally, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith intervenes in order to state what is genuine Catholic teaching and demand a response to the serious criticisms. Haight's supporters then contact the news media (see the front page of the April 24 *Boston Globe*), claiming loss of academic freedom, when in fact he has failed a test of academic scholarship.

Imbelli raises serious concerns. It is important not to enable theologians to evade the criticisms of their scholarly colleagues. If more popular periodicals held them to account, perhaps it would encourage theologians to respond to important criticisms of their work. If they fail to do so, at least Catholic readers would have more information than evasive complaints about the CDF lacking fairness. On this topic read Stephen Patton's letter

comparing the CDF procedures favorably with those operative in the American judicial system (*America*, May 14). I recall a fine essay written many years ago by James O'Gara communicating some serious criticisms the work of Yves Congar made of the more popular Hans Küng. The review of Roger Haight's book you published by John Cavadini (October 8, 1999), along with the exchange of letters and Cavadini's responses, was in this *Commonweal* tradition. I believe that many more than Imbelli would want you to maintain and strengthen that tradition.

(REV.) MATTHEW L. LAMB
Boston, Mass.

Commonweal's evasions

In your June 15 issue you follow what Robert Imbelli called your "uncharacteristically tender-minded" editorial on l'affaire Haight with an equally uncharacteristically "personal" reply to Imbelli's trenchant criticism thereof. Past replies to reader criticism usually evinced a lighter touch, often punctuated by self-deprecating humor. Imbelli seems to have struck a nerve.

Dominating the interchange is a sharp divergence on the relative priority of procedure and truth. Imbelli, while acknowledging "the need for more openness and accountability" in the CDF's procedures for handling suspect theologians, gives pride of place to "judgment and truth about dogma...and the privileged role of the magisterium in [the] discernment of God's revelation in Christ" and laments the absence of any mention of these in your editorial. This priority he finds threatened by "procedural liberalism," that is, discussion without end or resolution. The genuineness of this threat should be evident to anyone who, like Imbelli himself, has served long and hard in the trenches of contemporary theological warfare.

Commonweal, in contrast, finds the main issue to be the ecclesial procedures by which truth may come to light. For what is at stake is not some

matter somewhere down the ladder of the hierarchy of truths, but its highest rung and lynchpin: the confession of Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. We're talking the meat and potatoes of core Christian identity here, and all of *Commonweal's* heavy breathing about communal discernment, which ends—rather disgracefully—with the ad hominem taunt that Imbelli may be the captive of a secretive "clerical culture," cannot conceal this primary and very bald fact.

All in all, not *Commonweal's* finest hour, not by a long shot.

DENNIS FERRARA
Washington, D.C.

Jubilee of authority

I find it very hard to believe that Robert Imbelli, whom I have always respected, could wonder in his letter to the editor if we are "experiencing a paralysis of authority" in the church. For the past ten years in particular, it's seemed more like a jubilee of authority. In English translations, in liturgy, in university life, in ecclesiastical appointments, in the topics open to discussion and debate in Rome and elsewhere, there seem to be few signs of such paralysis. Paralysis of leadership, yes. Authority? Hardly.

TOM BAKER
Princeton, N.J.

Defend theologians

For Rodger Van Allen's excellent defense of Catholic theologians in Catholic universities ("Theologians in the Dock," May 4), thank you. He states the case as it should be stated: the mandate situation is based on the false charge that Catholic theologians do not present authentic Catholic teaching or distinguish church teaching from theological research and dialogue. Those theologians who refuse to apply for or accept the mandate do so in good conscience, in full communion with the rest of us, the church. What remains to be said are points about responsibility. First: trustees, administra-

(Continued on page 28)

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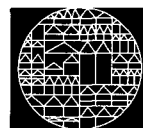
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C O M M O N W E A L



Religion & genocide

Last month two Benedictine nuns were convicted in a Belgian court of collaborating in the murder of thousands during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Sister Gertrude Mukangango and Sister Maria Kisito were sentenced to fifteen and twelve years' imprisonment, respectively, for their roles in turning over to their Hutu killers seven thousand Tutsi who had sought asylum in the nuns' monastery. In addition to betraying those who had found refuge at the monastery, the sisters willingly provided the gasoline used by Hutu militiamen to burn down a garage in which five hundred Tutsi men, women, and children were hiding. The two women subsequently fled to Belgium, Rwanda's former colonial ruler, in the hope of escaping prosecution by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the Tutsi-led government now in control of the traumatized Central African country. More than eight hundred thousand Tutsi were killed in less than three months at the hands of the Hutu majority in what is considered one of the worst genocides of the twentieth century.

There appears to be little doubt about the women's guilt. Crucial to the prosecution was the willingness of other Benedictine sisters to testify against them. Sister Gertrude and Sister Maria were tried under a Belgian law that allows the state to prosecute crimes committed in another country. The convictions are unprecedented because this is the first time that a jury in one country has convicted anyone of genocidal acts that occurred in another country. Human-rights activists are hopeful that the Belgian verdicts will give new impetus to the prosecution of war crimes.

Of course, bringing the perpetrators of crimes against humanity to justice is notoriously difficult, especially when the killers comprise a large portion of the population of an entire society, as was the case among the Hutu of Rwanda. There are still one hundred thirty thousand people suspected of genocidal acts in jails in Rwanda. Currently, the UN is conducting trials in Tanzania of a few of the accused, but the process has been fitful, and only eight convictions have been secured in seven years. With few surviving witnesses, evidence hard to come by, and severe logistical and financial constraints, justice can seem all but unattainable. Added to these obstacles and complications is the poor internal human-rights record of the current government, which has also played a large role in the civil war and widespread massacres now convulsing the Congo.

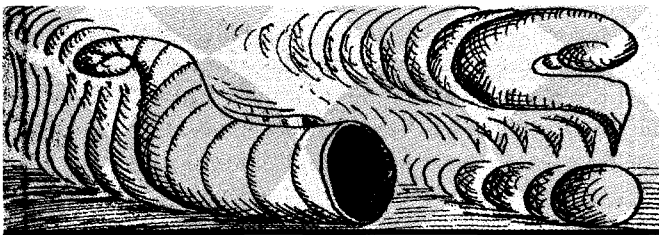
In this context, the Belgian verdict appears remarkably fair and a welcome instance of measured justice. And that makes the Vatican's response to the convictions doubly disappointing. Joaquin Navarro-Valls, Vatican spokesman, went out of his way to cast doubt on the motives of the prosecutors. "The Holy See cannot but express a certain surprise at seeing the grave responsibility of so many people and groups involved in this tremendous genocide in the heart of Africa heaped on so few people," he said. While acknowledging that those Catholics guilty of murder must accept full responsibility for their acts, Navarro-Valls insisted that the church "cannot be held responsible for the sins of its members."

This sort of language is, of course, familiar from "We Remember," the Vatican's parsimonious 1998 statement on the Holocaust. Unfortunately, the institutional

and theological defensiveness that colors such Vatican reactions cast more doubt than light on the church's claims. To be fair, Navarro-Valls's statement can be understood as a response to the way the RPF has used the Catholic church as a scapegoat in an effort to deflect attention from its own crimes and abuses of power. But the Vatican is wrong to raise such suspicions in the context of the Belgian trial, which was not under RPF influence, and which represents a significant step toward the successful prosecution of human-rights crimes. It is equally dispiriting to learn that prominent Belgian lay Catholics and church officials attempted to block the trial altogether, and, when that failed, tried to discourage the other Benedictine nuns from testifying against the indicted sisters.

Rwanda is a predominantly Catholic country, and the church's missionary work early in the last century often did exacerbate ethnic antagonism between Tutsi and Hutu. That said, the church cannot be held responsible for the genocide, which was planned and carried out by Hutu leaders motivated by political grievances and ethnic hatred. Catholic bishops, priests, and sisters suffered martyrdom at the hands of the militias, and ordinary Hutu Catholics were killed trying to protect Tutsi neighbors. It is equally true, however, that other clerics and nuns supported the Hutu genocide or stood by silently as it unfolded. Catholics were found on both sides of this enormous crime, and it is sobering that the pervasive Catholic institutional and cultural presence in Rwanda proved little impediment to such mind-numbing savagery.

Faced with these facts, the church's response to the lawful prosecution of Catholics involved in mass killings should never hint at grudging acceptance or parochial interests. That those schooled and trained for visible leadership in the church succumbed to hateful violence is an occasion for self-examination and humility, not self-serving lectures about the distinction between the church "as such" and her fallible sons and daughters. Some Catholics never tire of warning that the tolerance and pluralism of Western democracy has resulted in our losing sight of the existence of moral truth. Democracy is doomed, they say, if it does not recognize the relationship between God and humankind as well as the relationship between morality and politics. There is something to this critique. But the genocide in Rwanda once again reminds us that even when the church enjoys a place of preeminence in a culture, there is no guarantee that the truth about the relationship between God and humankind will be a living reality in people's hearts, even among those who represent the official church.



Who speaks for Pope George? ■ Success has a million fathers; failure is an orphan. By this measure, George W. Bush's recent commencement speech at the University of Notre Dame was a success. Several people have told us, each with absolute authority, who drafted the speech. Unfortunately, the authoritative versions don't agree. One name, emphatically reported, was Michael Novak, who also was present at Notre Dame as part of the presidential party. Frankly, the speech didn't read like Novak's prose, with which we're pretty familiar since, in a previous political existence, he was a columnist here. Still, the ideas could have been his, reworked a bit by White House wordsmiths. Now, however, we read a declaration from *National Review Online* that the president's address "is a marvelously succinct statement of first principles" and "should be produced as a pamphlet."

The author of this encomium? Michael Novak. Guess that rules him out as the president's ghostwriter. Doesn't it?

Staying unstealthy ■ President Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have promised to revamp and restructure the U.S. military for the twenty-first century. Speculation says the administration's forthcoming proposals will aim at more efficient and flexible armed forces. Our technological age and the changing nature of the threats facing the nation demand new thinking and innovative capabilities.

In that light, it was a surprise to learn that Rumsfeld is thinking about buying forty new B-2 "stealth" bombers. Yes, *those* B-2s. The B-2s they stopped building four years ago.

The B-2, you may remember, is the black, bat-winged aircraft whose claim to fame was that it could not be detected by enemy radar. Its other claim to fame is that it is the world's most expensive plane. Congress bought twenty, at \$2.2-billion apiece, before throwing up its hands in exasperation in 1993. Not only were the planes ludicrously expensive to buy, but also ludicrously expensive to maintain. The Air Force currently spends \$140 million a year trying to keep the planes in flying condition. A small army of one thousand maintenance workers is assigned the task. Worse, the "stealth" bomber proved to be a lot less stealthy than anticipated. The slightest imperfection in its famous "skin" made it quite detectable by enemy radar, and repairing that skin is (you guessed it) expensive and time consuming. Nor is the plane useful in daylight hours. In fact, during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, the B-2 could only fly missions at night. During the day it's color and size made it stick out like a budget-overrun.

So why buy more of what looks like one of the great military boondoggles? Well, the B-2's manufacturer is now offering the bombers at a mere \$735 million each.

Who could resist such a bargain?

JOHN GARVEY



SINNING & SORROWING

Taking confession seriously

When I was about to be ordained, it occurred to me that there was something particularly strange about the sacrament of confession. (I suppose this occurred to me because suddenly I would be in the position of having to hear confessions.) I had seen and participated in all the other sacraments in a public way; but the only confessions I had experienced were my own—private conversations with a priest, before God, but still, unlike any other sacrament, private.

In *Commonweal*'s discussion of confession (February 23), I found two things curious. One was that the relationship of confession to baptism and our incorporation into the life of Christ was neglected; the other was that the history of the sacrament was ignored. The history is vital if we are to see how the sacrament assumed its present form, and if we are to find ways to make it a serious part of the Christian life.

The earliest Christians believed that in baptism we were joined to the life of Christ, and our sins were forgiven. Serious sin led to a separation from the community. In the second-century *The Shepherd of Hermas* we are told that someone who had sinned seriously was allowed a second chance, but only one. Some took the stance that no reconciliation was possible. This gradually gave way to a system under which those who had sinned seriously (the three great sins were murder, apostasy, and adultery, because they struck directly at the heart of the community) stood in a special place in the church, often wearing rags or skins, and were denied Communion for a specific, usually lengthy, period of time. At the end of the period of repentance they were reconciled, through a

prayer offered by the bishop. Some sins led to lifelong excommunication. Saint John Chrysostom was unusual in his practice of accepting sinners back into communion after repeated falls, and he was harshly criticized (and eventually deposed) by other bishops.

At the same time, in the monastic movement—originally made up of lay people—monks were encouraged to confess to an experienced elder, confessing not only their sins but the whole of their inner life.

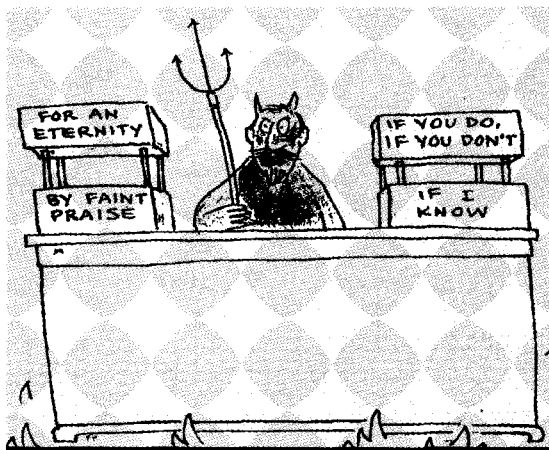
Confession of this sort was not only a way of repenting and being reconciled to the church; it was a way toward a deeper spiritual life, a way of drawing close to God. This stream of tradition was incorporated into the sacrament of confession, which for pastoral reasons gradually lost its public character. (One reason was that so many people found the public penances so harsh that people who should receive the sacrament were avoiding it.) Some people—perhaps the majority—still went to confession simply to receive absolution from their sins, but others saw it as an opportunity for spiritual direction.

Perhaps confession has fallen into disuse among many people because they no longer see sin in legalistic terms, but

there are other reasons as well. Confession was too often seen as a necessary ticket to be punched before Communion, and its connection with baptism was lost. The point of confession—apart from the public penance done to reconcile serious sinners to the community—is this: if, in baptism, I am joined to Christ and my sins are forgiven, what do I do about the fact that I still hold grudges, quarrel, fail to help the poor, and so forth? In the early church people dealt with these problems through prayer and private acts of repentance, and through participation in the Eucharist. (In the Orthodox Church, Communion is given with the words, "The servant of God...is given the most holy and pure body and blood of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins and life everlasting.") As spiritual direction became a part of confession, it made sense to receive it as a means of dealing with less serious sins.

Unless confession's connection with the idea of baptism is restored, it will seem to be an empty routine for most people, particularly in the absence of spiritual direction. I know what a feeling of relief it can bring to people who have sinned seriously; but we have too little sense of the fact that all sin is serious. I like what Gustave Weigel, S.J., once said: the man who invented the distinction between mortal and venial sin must surely be in hell. In the Orthodox Church some priests insist on confession before every Communion; others ask people to confess during penitential periods, particularly Lent. But these confessions are often empty exercises, and it is essential for priests and people to see the sacrament as an opportunity for spiritual growth. This means that priests must themselves be serious about living a life grounded in prayer, which is much more than a life grounded in liturgy, though that too is essential.

Baptism is the sacrament from which the others flow, and it is only through attention to the theology of baptism that our sense of confession—and for that matter all the other sacraments—will be refreshed for us. □



E.J. DIONNE Jr.**LAWSUITS & PRICE CONTROLS***Where economics & politics meet*

Republicans are supposed to be the party of states' rights. Democrats are supposed to be the party of the national government. So why is it that in the great debate over a patients' bill of rights, it's the Democrats who insist that patients should be able to sue their HMOs in state courts and Republicans, including President George W. Bush, who see suits in state courts as an abomination?

It may have something to do with the fact that patients generally get a better break and bigger settlements in state courts—the courts that are, as the Republicans would say on so many other issues, “closest to the people.” And Republicans just hate the idea that plaintiffs and their lawyers might get some money out of those HMOs. “The idea is to serve more patients, not to create more lawsuits,” the president said.

But what if lawsuits and, more important, the threat of lawsuits, might make the HMOs more responsive to patients' needs? If you see trial lawyers as being regularly in the wrong, that question is politically incorrect. Better, in this view, to risk HMOs being less responsive than to invite more lawsuits.

Personally, I'm not big on lawsuits as the best way to settle disputes. But this debate, and several others now going on, suggests that a lot of positions held out as matters of high principle are nothing of the sort. When Republicans say they're for states' rights, they don't really mean it when it comes to anything having to do with lawsuits. If keeping things federal and national will reduce the ability of plaintiffs to challenge corporations and HMOs, Republicans are all for big government in Washington.

In fairness, Democrats have their own inconsistency on the same issue. They do, indeed, side with trial lawyers on most questions. They therefore like states' rights and devolution to local juries because those juries are more likely to side with those who bring suit.

What both inconsistencies suggest is that the real debate in our country is only occasionally about local power. It is usually about economic power. It's about the right of individuals, singularly or collectively, to challenge established economic institutions, either in court or before regulatory bodies. On most issues, Republicans want the market to rule while Democrats think the market should

be tempered—by regulation, by lawsuit, and by social insurance and modest economic redistribution.

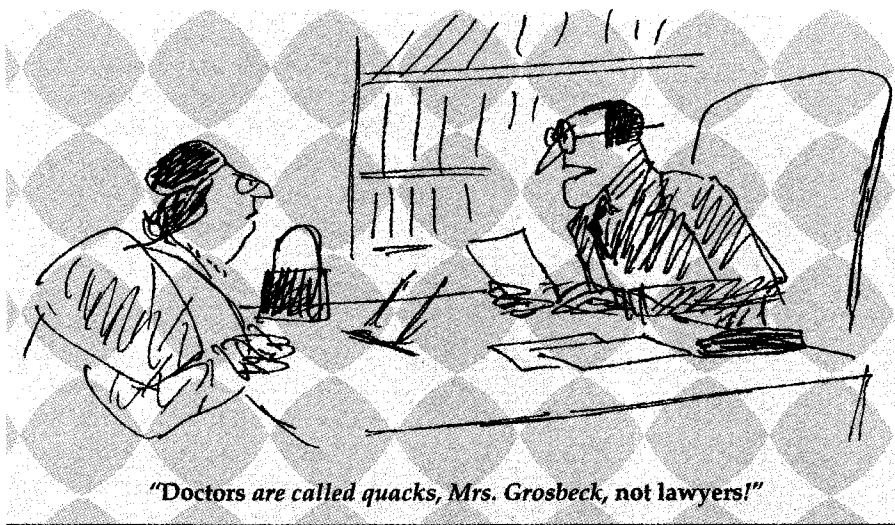
Fortunately, we are a democracy and the voters usually rebel against pure market outcomes when they think such outcomes are shortchanging their interests or things they value. That's why the debate over the cost of electricity on the West Coast has been so fascinating. No matter how many economists defended the market and the behavior of the electricity giants, the people of the West knew there was something very strange about the exorbitant increases in the prices they were paying for power.

Eventually, the people's will and reality triumphed over ideology. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission voted for a form of price controls after the president and many Republicans insisted that price controls were a terrible idea. Given the president's insistence that he opposed price controls, and given the insistence of California Republicans that something had to be done to quench the rebellion of West Coast voters, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer had to square a circle. He tried hard. “This is not a price control,” Fleischer insisted. “This is a market-based mitigation plan.” OK. If the cost of taking a first step toward price controls is to insist they're not price controls, that will be just fine by Western consumers—as long as their prices go down. And the phrase “market-based mitigation plan” deserves a place in the pantheon of political euphemisms.

The fact is that Republicans almost always side with corporate interests, partly because that is where their support comes from and partly because they truly believe in the unfettered market. The Democrats are more ambivalent. They get corporate contributions, too, and are friends of the market in principle. But they are also more willing than Republicans to challenge market outcomes.

If both parties could be honest about the nature of their differences, we could drop the euphemisms and the phony talk about “states' rights” and “local control.” And then we could have a real debate. □

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Michael O. Garvey

DEATH IN TERRE HAUTE

The execution of Timothy McVeigh

A retarded man on a bicycle, the only visible resident of Terre Haute, Indiana, early on Trinity Sunday morning, June 10, 2001, directed me to Saint Benedict's Church, where there would be an 8 A.M. Mass. The Wabash Valley was steamy that morning, and I sought the darkest, coolest place in the cruciform interior. During the homily, I noticed that each of the four cardinal virtues was represented by its own clerestory window and that the comfortable pew seat I had chosen faced the most beclouded of them, justice.

No specific mention of Timothy McVeigh's execution the next day was made in our formal prayer. We prayed for all victims of terrorism and that all who faced capital punishment be moved to repent and know the forgiveness of God. An announcement after Mass reminded us that volunteers were needed for the snow cone booth at Saint Benedict's community fun fest next month.

Leaving Mass, we could hear strains of martial music from a civic liturgy beginning at the Vigo County Courthouse on Third Street a few blocks away. I found a parking place in front of the Army recruiting office directly across the street from the courthouse and next to a large yellow Ryder truck, a reminder of the Oklahoma City bombing and conspicuous as a tasteless joke.

A bronze statue of Corporal Charles G. Abrell, a Terre Haute native and Korean War hero, was being unveiled on the southeast corner of the courthouse lawn. Killed in action fifty years ago that morning, Abrell, despite serious wounds, had stormed a heavily fortified North Korean position, removed the pin from a hand grenade, and held it while diving into an enemy bunker, killing himself and the bunker's gun crew. A suicide bomber and courageous Marine, Abrell was clearly well loved by his hometown. A large civilian crowd joined a hundred members of the Terre Haute Marine Corps League to listen to the regimental band, admire the color guard, and marvel at the thunderous flyover of F-16 fighters. A young father in the crowd gave me directions to the federal penitentiary while his son swayed on the man's shifting shoulders. The little boy's eyes were merry but wide open in the deafening wake of the passing jets, and his hands stayed clamped over his ears.

At the penitentiary entrance, police, media, onlookers, and passing drivers enacted rituals normally associated with college football games, state fairs, presidential visits, and rock concerts. A generator-powered electronic sign flashed alternating messages in huge green letters to the heavy traffic which was being shooed past by officious Indiana State troopers: "Pro demonstrators use Vorhees Park. Anti demon-

strators use Fairbanks Park." Where ticket scalpers might ordinarily post themselves, a man wearing an orange T-shirt and a baseball cap sat in a lawn chair brandishing a crudely lettered sign which read, "Our Jesus forgives Tim, even if we don't." Another man bore a huge wooden cross, like Jesus making the stations, toward the tent city for media people and their equipment which had grown on the east side of Indiana 63, and barkers offered parking spots for \$20 an hour. Soft drinks, ice, sandwiches, and *sati babi* were for sale at stands along the road. Satellite dishes, radio antennae, and less identifiable electronic apparatus poked up everywhere. An immaculately coifed CNN correspondent struck poses before a camera crew. In the shade of a sycamore grove, bikers sat cross-legged on idled Harleys, heckling the gapers and high-fiving each other. The sky was aswarm with helicopters.

The two municipal parks from which Bureau of Prisons (BOP) buses shuttled demonstrators to and from the penitentiary were far more serene. In Vorhees Park, four death-penalty advocates had assembled by sundown, somewhat abashed by the score of impatient media people surrounding them. A nursing student held up a sign inscribed "Thou Shalt Not Kill...and Live" and told anyone who would listen—everyone present, as it turned out—that she believed McVeigh should be put to death because "I was raised a Catholic." The church teaches that two wrongs don't make a right, she explained, which means that 168 wrongs cer-



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Epiphanies

1.
That dream's abandonment
is merely a haggard
flashback by now
and nothing seems more certain
than the hands on a clock
that have never deserted
their embryonic circle.
2.
I watch a giraffe unwinged
and yet as lofty as a bird
cropping leaves for nourishment
where even nests could be.

Jack Lindeman

Antibodies

In arthritic persons
they turn on one,
eroding joints.
In asthmatics
they close airways
that suck in life.
Much as a sock
turned inside out
would be an antisoak,
in each body
lurk antibodies,
antitheses to flesh,
antagonists to presence,
the principle of *unbody*.
We require them
as earth needs poles,
one valence conceived
in the other.
Against darkness
broke forth the light.
From vast despair
leaks out faith.

William M. Ramsey

In keeping with *Commonweal's* usual schedule, only one issue is published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated August 17.

tainly don't. About Pope John Paul II's recent appeal for clemency, she said only that the Holy Father was entitled to his opinion and she was entitled to hers. Asked about the low turnout, one of her comrades, a thinly bearded young man who looked remarkably like Timothy McVeigh, said "Terre Haute's a shy little Midwestern town, but we think most people support us." In Fairbanks Park, Indian students from nearby Indiana State University played a game of cricket, and bored journalists began to interview each other.

Of the fifteen hundred print, radio, and television reporters in Terre Haute on Trinity Sunday evening, the most story-starved made their way to Saint Margaret Mary Church, where they awkwardly outnumbered participants in an evening prayer service. One of McVeigh's attorneys, Robert Nigh, prayed with us for the bombing victims, for McVeigh, and for Juan Garza, another federal prisoner whose execution was scheduled for June 19. McVeigh and Garza, like the other Catholic inmates of the federal penitentiary, were members of Saint Margaret Mary Parish, and McVeigh had asked Father Ron Ashmore, the pastor, that we read the familiar verses from Ecclesiastes ("For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal..."); from Psalm 103 ("the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love....He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities..."); and from the less familiar and far less memorable words of Charley Reese, a cranky *Orlando Sentinel* columnist, on the futility of violence.

A few hours later, early Monday morning on the penitentiary grounds, some 150 of us did the very little we could do, keeping silence for 168 minutes preceding the death of Timothy McVeigh. We prayed for each of the men, women, and children he murdered. We prayed for McVeigh. We prayed for the BOP personnel who would kill him, and for the men and women who would watch him die. At 7 A.M., as the poison was administered a thousand yards away, many of us faced the death chamber and made the sign of the cross, praying that this unamiable man, with all the rest of us—perpetrators, heroes, victims, and distracted passers-by—might be subsumed in its immolation.

He was dead fourteen minutes later. □

Michael O. Garvey, a frequent contributor to *Commonweal*, is the author of *Finding Fault*.

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FOLLOW THE MONEY

Why campaigns should be publicly financed

Jay Mandle

What would happen if the United States funded the Defense Department through private contributions? Would those sections of the country that contribute more to defense be better protected than those that gave less? If the interstate highway system were paid for by the donations of private citizens, how likely is it that the nation's transportation system would serve the entire country and not just those who foot the bill?

The answers to such questions are obvious. Few would doubt that if these services were privately financed, their benefits would be biased toward the funders. The interests of the rest of the population would at best be an afterthought. Damaging as such a system would be, what then is to be said about a political system in which the wealthy provide the bulk of campaign financing? Certainly it would not be a stretch to say that a political system paid for by the affluent is one that will be disproportionately responsive to the well-off and less attentive to the needs of the rest of the population.

Funding for elections in a democracy should not depend on an economic elite. When the rich pay for electoral campaigns, the substance of politics is confined to the issues and policies that wealthy funders approve of. To be sure, the electorate gets to vote. But the choices presented to voters are, at best, those that are acceptable to the wealthy. At worst, of course, such a system is simply corrupt.

Almost all economically developed democracies have tried to reduce the importance of private money in elections. A study by the Center for a New Democracy and the Center for Responsive Politics showed that only the United States, Ireland, and Switzerland do not either provide public financing for candidates to the national legislature, or restrict the expenditures of such candidates. Further, the United States is alone in not providing free media time to office seekers. Presidential candidates in this country do have the option of funding their campaigns with public money (Albert Gore chose public funding, while George W. Bush relied exclusively on private donations). In addition, four states offer significant public financing for state offices and several cities do the same for local races. Nevertheless, the United States lags behind virtually all of the developed world in the effort to democratize elections.

Jay Mandle is the W. Branford Wiley Professor of Economics at Colgate University. He is also director of development for Democracy Matters (www.democracymatters.org).

The dominance of the rich is now so blatant that even politicians who benefit from it are ashamed. The McCain-Feingold Bill (Shays-Meehan in the House of Representatives) is a well-intentioned effort at reform. This legislation imposes a ban on "soft money" payments to national parties, and restricts "issue advocacy" by unions, corporations, and other interest groups. It is not hard to understand what motivates these limitations. Unregulated donations made for "party building" easily find their way into electoral campaigns. Similarly, issue-advocacy ads have become an only slightly disguised means of circumventing current campaign contribution limits.

There are elements of McCain-Feingold, however, that raise concerns. The first and most obvious is that, as passed by the Senate, the legislation doubles the permitted level of "hard money" contributions. Obviously this provision—perhaps necessary to secure Senate passage—is a concession that chips away at the principle that private money in elections should be curtailed. Two other aspects of the legislation are also worrisome. First, its passage is likely to result in increased, not decreased, public cynicism because, in the end, the legislation's restrictions will not do very much to rid the system of its pro-wealth bias. News reports have already appeared detailing how the major political parties plan to circumvent the law's intent. The prevailing view is that with the banning of soft money, political action committees (PACs) will once again serve as the conduit of choice for the wealthy. Finding other loopholes in the law has already begun.



american catholics in the public square

Do American Catholics approach civic life differently than do other Americans? Can a Catholic presence in the public square contribute something distinctive to the nation's political and cultural debates? How has American culture affected Catholic political and social thought? Are younger Catholics being drawn to new expressions of public Catholicism — or to none at all?

American Catholics in the Public Square is a three-year research project aimed at

- identifying distinctive elements in a Catholic approach to civic life;
- exploring the strengths and weaknesses of this tradition in the American context;
- examining how the tradition is being currently expressed and transmitted;
- analyzing the obstacles, within the culture or the church, that impede a more robust Catholic presence in the public square.

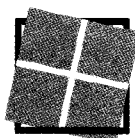
American Catholics in the Public Square is co-sponsored by the Commonweal Foundation in New York City and the Faith & Reason Institute in Washington, D.C. It is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Participants in the project's meetings have included: Scott Appleby, Benedict Ashley, Paul Baumann, Peter Berkowitz, Joseph Bottum, John Carr, Peter Casarella, John A. Coleman, Charles E. Curran, James Davidson, Michelle Dillon, Augustine Di Noia, E.J. Dionne, Jean Bethke Elshtain, James Fisher, Bryan Froehle, William Galston, Dana Gioia, J. Bryan Hehir, Russell Hittinger, John Langan, David Leege, Jane Mansbridge, Mark Massa, John McGreevy, Mary McGrory, Ralph McNerny, Wilson Carey McWilliams, Philip Murnion, Michael Novak, Kate O'Beirne, David O'Brien, Michael Perry, Stephen Pope, Jean Porter, Thomas Reese, Robert Royal, Russell Shaw, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, Peter Steinfels, Leslie Tentler, Robert Wilken, John Wilkins, Gregory Wolfe.

Information about the project, its past and future conferences, reports, and papers can be found at **www.catholicsinpublicsquare.org**.

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The second matter of concern is the impact of McCain-Feingold on the political parties. Parties are vehicles for political mobilization and expression. Depriving them of funds tends to weaken an important mechanism by which opinion is expressed. The banning of issue-advocacy advertisements does the same. It narrows the scope of political discussion without creating an alternative outlet for public debate.

This argument is used by critics of campaign finance reform, such as Bradley A. Smith who, in his recent book, *Unfree Speech* (Princeton), plausibly maintains that legislation such as McCain-Feingold will reduce political debate. Smith, a member of the Federal Elections Commission, also contends, in this case unconvincingly, that campaign contributions play only a minimal role in shaping policies and legislation. But even he does not totally deny the problems associated with privately financed campaigns. Rather, Smith argues that the unintended consequence of limiting private financing will do more harm than good.

What about a reform that does not limit contributions, instead making public money available to candidates? Public financing would provide funds directly to viable candidates, enabling them to present their ideas and policies without considering the effect on potential contributors. With public financing, there would be no need to be concerned with the inevitable loopholes that will be found in any effort to regulate political contributions.

In this case Smith reverses course and argues against reform not on principle, but because of political expediency. Smith concedes the advantages associated with public financing of elections: increased electoral competitiveness and accountability; a better flow of information to voters; and an increase in the number of well-qualified candidates. Nevertheless Smith opposes this kind of reform. In this case, however, it is not because of a lack of intrinsic merit, but because it is an approach that is "off the charts politically."

Taken at face value, Smith's argument constitutes a case for grass-roots organizing. Polls show that the American people overwhelmingly support reforming the electoral system but shy away from full public financing as a remedy. What is at issue here is the antipathy of the American people to government social programs. The criticism made by opponents of reform that public financing presents "welfare for politicians" brilliantly taps into this hostility. Therefore, this attitude must change if we are to democratize our electoral system.

To persuade the American people to support the public financing of elections it will be necessary to convince them

that elections are a "public good." Public goods are services that by their nature tend to be shared not only by those who pay but also by those who do not pay. Their use by one person generally does not preclude their use by others. Because of the collective way they are consumed, it is logical that they be purchased socially. If there is an attempt to have public goods privately funded, their availability becomes inadequate and their use distorted. If we tried to have our roads paid for privately we would wind up with a patchwork of toll roads located where users dictate instead of a network that links the whole society together. The same is true of policing. If based on private consumption, police would work to ensure the safety of those willing to pay, while the rest would go unprotected. As a consequence the society would be deprived of any hope of a consistent and fair administration of justice.

Many of the same attributes that make the nation's defense or highway system public goods are present in the

electoral system. The outcome of elections affects all the people of the country, whether or not they contribute financially to campaigns. In politics, of course, the problem is not that campaigns are underfinanced—the deep pockets of wealthy special interests ensure that that is not the case. But the generosity of private funders does corrupt and distort the electoral process. Just as we would not want the highway system to serve private, as opposed to public, needs, or the police to protect one group of citizens but not another, we should not be satisfied when every election is little more than an exercise in which the wealthy seek access and influence by con-

tributing to the campaign war chests of politicians. The solution is for the community as a whole to foot the bill.

Voters have to be persuaded that the electoral system is just as important to the health—in this case the democratic health—of the nation as the defense budget, airports, highways, schools, and law enforcement. The costs of electoral campaigns should be paid for out of tax revenues. Doing so would ensure that each outcome reflects the interests of all, not just the privileged few.

Obviously it will take much educational and political work to persuade voters to look at elections in this way. But until that is done, we will not be able to alter the reality that the private funding of electoral campaigns is the means by which the affluent set the political agenda. For reform to happen, grass-roots pressure is required. In its absence not much will change. Politicians have too great a stake in the current system. In short, campaign finance reform is a cause in need of a social movement.

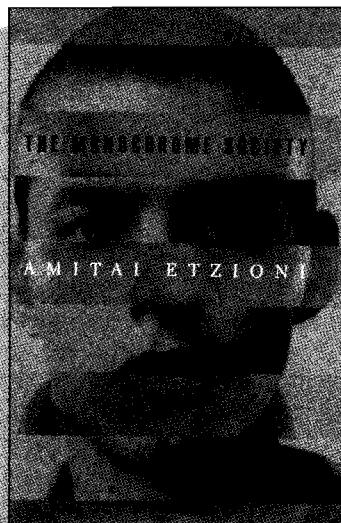
There is reason for hope in this regard. Recent experience

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that the electoral system
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Setting Sail

Yesterday is dead,
but Apollo's lathered horses drag
another day, trailing crowds of hours
across the sky, while I stand
under X-ray's godless light,
paper shirt for armor, breast flesh
pressed between two plates,
until a bloody drop wets the tender nipple,
as if Zeus, that rooster,
had stalked into the room, but all the eggs
are broken, and the Gods are calling.

By noon, that angry Goddess,
Discord, has thrown the apple of my breast
into the feast, my bones are
cast, and every choice
will start the war, simple peeling
and the spot removed,
or all my fruit plucked and gone.
The Fates have spun and hold
their scissors high, waiting to cut
my thread, or not.

Taking on supplies and water for the voyage,
I find the dog has killed,
not a sacred stag in these unsacred times,
unfurnished with beautiful mysteries,
but a simple skunk.
Tomato sauce poured over the hound's
reeking fur, she bends her head
like Iphigenia, dripping red,
shivering with unrequited surprise.

Now the canvas bellies tight with dreams
and wind, as night's egg floats again
on chaos. Aphrodite, Hera, Pallas Athene,
who ate burnt offering in different seasons,
sit on the salt stained deck. They watch
me sleep, right hand holding my breast
the way those Trojan women will hold
a certain wooden horse
and roll it hopefully inside their walls.
Hold on. Hold on.
The only algebra to lock my gates
has not been conjured
yet, the poem's unwritten, and Friday
won't be Good until this war is done.

Louise Murphy

has convinced at least some activists that solving global economic and environmental problems must begin with domestic U.S. politics. For example, the Kyoto global environmental accord has been subverted by the refusal of the United States to accede to its terms. The United States has also failed to ratify the International Labor Organization's core labor standards, thus providing a license to anti-union efforts in poor countries. And the International Monetary Fund's notorious structural adjustment programs, depriving the poor of assistance and education, are in place because the United States, the country with the single largest influence in that organization, insists that what poor countries need is minimalist government. In all of this there is encouragement to be drawn from the fact that people in the movements addressing these issues increasingly recognize that the roadblock to progress is the role of private wealth in our politics.

A second source of hope has been the democratizing of the electoral process in cities and states around the country. In Maine, Arizona, and Massachusetts "clean money, clean elections" campaigns have won, and the option of full public funding of elections has been implemented. In cities such as New York and Long Beach and Oakland in California, partial public funding of elections has been adopted. These initiatives are the result of dedicated local organizers working far outside the glare of national publicity. Organizers know that triumphs at the state and local levels are critical in the struggle for national reform. Indeed, the history of progressive politics in the United States suggests that the momentum for federal legislation must bubble up from the grass roots. There would be no national civil rights, women's rights, or environmental legislation if it were not for such local groundwork.

The campaign-finance reform movement desperately needs an infusion of energy and enthusiasm. Advocates of reform have not been well served by the "Beltway" mentality. There are far too many lobbyists and lawyers tinkering with the details of reform legislation, and not nearly enough student and community activists holding politicians' feet to the fire. Democracy Matters, a campus-based organization with which I am associated, is attempting to reorient campaign-finance reform efforts. Our strategy anticipates that students working with diverse communities will find an outlet with a real possibility for political success. At the same time, community activists working with students will gain much-needed help in carrying out their efforts. Such a coalition can stimulate a rethinking of the way political campaigns should be financed.

Success will ultimately depend on whether these two wings of activism—students and local communities—join together. United States global and domestic policy will remain a private preserve of the rich and corporate interests as long as politics remain in thrall to the wealthy. Those who advocate change in America—and the world—cannot win until our elections are publicly financed. □

Richard Alleva

HOW SICK CAN WE GET?

Very



In Paris, on December 11, 1896, William Butler Yeats attended the opening night of a play. Years later, he wrote about the event in his autobiography.

"I go to the first performance of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* [*King Ubu*], at the Theatre de l'Oeuvre...The audience shake their fists at one another...The players are supposed to be dolls, toys, marionettes, and now they are all hopping like wooden frogs, and I can see for myself that the chief personage, who is some kind of king, carries for a scepter a brush of the kind that we use to clean a closet. Feeling bound to support the most spirited party, we have shouted for the play, but that night...I am very sad, for comedy, objectivity, has displayed its growing power once more...After S. Mallarmé, after Verlaine...after our own verse, after the faint mixed tints of Condor [*sic*], what more is possible? After us, the Savage God."

Despite his limited knowledge of French, Yeats well understood that he was seeing no ordinary comedy but something raw and unleashed, something that tore aside artfully arranged veils and wiped away the "faint mixed tints" not only of a painter like Charles Conder but of everything impressionistic, including the Celtic twilight of his own early verse. *King Ubu*, based on the playwright Alfred Jarry's own physics teacher at his lycée, is a grotesque exaggeration of the classic tragic tyrant, a Macbeth transformed into a screaming puppet. He wields a toilet brush as scepter, carries his conscience about in a suitcase, and the very first word he utters on stage is a deliberate misspelling of the French for excrement.

There is satire in the play, but satire—mockery of evil and stupidity in defense of virtue and competence—is never its main objective. Ubu serving excrement

at his royal feast, with his wife responding "*chacun à son goût*" to a guest's mild objection; the tyrant taking oaths "by my green candle," meaning his own gonorrheic sex organ; he and his wife squabbling in the language of two kids slanging each other in a schoolyard; the king slaughtering his entire bureaucracy by dropping each official through a trapdoor into a dungeon where they will be "debrained"—all this serves a comedy that strips mankind of all striving for dignity, conscience, sentiment. This is the peculiar savagery of the Savage God.

As Roger Shattuck wrote in *The Banquet Years* (1977), "The schoolboy imagination had succeeded in throwing dung in the public eye. Some laughed and some were incensed, but no one could deny that it had been cunningly thrown...One must be careful not to look for the psychological veracity of satire in his [Jarry's] writing. He did not proceed like Molière or Aristophanes or Mark Twain, in whose works we find an intensification of familiar human characteristics. Jarry's humor may rather be regarded as a psychological refusal to repress distasteful images. He laughed and invited us to laugh at Ubu's most monstrous behavior...because it is a means of domesticating fear and pain."

In 1906, Jarry's writings established the farthest outposts of the literary avant-garde. But now, a century later, the Savage God has a townhouse in Manhattan and a ranch house in the suburbs. He's no longer a ragtag bohemian but a middle-class swell. The avant-garde of yesterday is today's pop culture, and much of that pop culture is notably in debt to the style of King Ubu.

Consider his progeny:

- The "shock jocks" of radio with their bathroom humor and insulting phone calls.

- Many "Saturday Night Live" skits, such as the one that pretends to be an advertisement for a device that transforms flatulence into human speech, thus allowing the victims of public gastric attacks to pretend to be making off-hand comments.

- The "South Park" TV series and movie.

- A large portion of the monologues of late-night TV hosts, especially Jay Leno.

- Many currently popular comedies, with *There's Something about Mary* leading the pack.

- *National Lampoon* magazine, which has always fastened, with a child's horrified fascination, on death, disease, and decay for much of its humor. Since many of *Lampoon's* alumni went to work on TV shows such as "SNL" and "Mad TV," and the former's movie spinoffs, Ubu-esque humor was dispersed throughout the culture.

- Since Ubu and his descendants drew upon a childish outlook while perpetrating their humor, it should come

*"We have been
called to heal
wounds, to unite
what has fallen
apart, and to
bring home those
who have lost
their way."*

—St. Francis of Assisi

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as no surprise that several of today's children's films now channel childish toilet jokes right back to the kids. Kid-die moviemaking, once squeaky-clean, is now pretty raunchy. *Shrek* and *The Emperor's New Groove* are a long way from *Bambi*, both in their hipness and in their grossness.

• Eminem has less in common with other rappers than with Quentin Tarantino, Lenny Bruce (at his most extreme), the Robert Smigel cartoons featured on "Saturday Night Live," the horror comics of the 1950s, and the early films of Sam Raimi (for example, *The Evil Dead*). Good or bad, Mr. Marshall Mathers (AKA Eminem) has found his form: not the rap song but the aural skit, very close to radio drama. In fact, listening to an Eminem number such as "Bonnie and Clyde 97" is like hearing one of the old radio melodramas, "Lights Out" or "Climax," rewritten by a psycho.

How and why did it happen? How did America, the most culturally puritanical nation in the Western world, become the most ribald and assaultive of entertainment purveyors? And why did it happen so fast, in only the last thirty-five years or so?

First: How? To be sure, American writers and entertainers didn't all suddenly begin reading Alfred Jarry and decide to become his epigones. Many of the entertainers I've mentioned may never have heard of *Ubu*, much less read it. But Jarry's writings influenced those of Apollinaire, André Breton, and Roger Vitrac, and eventually, at the end of a long chain of surrealists, those of Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. Their plays crossed the Atlantic and were extensively performed in the 1950s and '60s in New York venues

and by university and repertory theaters throughout the country during a short but intense period which gave rise to the label, Theater of the Absurd. The texts of Jarry, Beckett, and Ionesco became the assigned reading of drama and comparative literature courses, and their influence was felt in the early plays of Edward Albee (*The Sandbox*), Arthur Kopit (*Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad*), and several others.

Simultaneously, and perhaps more important, kids of the 1950s, '60s, and early '70s were being culturally nourished (or malnourished) on the magazines *Mad*, *Cracked*, and *Sick*, on Steve Allen, the American version of the British TV show, "That Was the Week that Was," horror comic books, Loony Tunes cartoons, Soupy Sales, the Three Stooges, "The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle," and on a host of other pop entities that suggested a view of life not far removed from Theater of the Absurd. The more intellectual kids were also listening to the records of Lenny Bruce, Shelly Berman, and Nichols and May, and maybe reading Allen Ginsburg, William Burroughs, and Terry Southern. Sooner or later—and in America everything happens sooner—the *angst* celebrated by highbrow culture and the raucousness of pop culture had to merge, and the *angst*, energized by the raucousness, would begin to look more and more like a slap-happy, devil-may-care nihilism.

What we are seeing and hearing now in American pop culture are the offspring of an intellectually mixed marriage: the children of the French avant-garde and all-American nuttiness.

Jarry/Ionesco/Beckett has mated with Bugs Bunny/*Mad* magazine/Bullwinkle the Moose, and their offspring turns out to be "South Park." Ubuesque nuttiness prevailed but with a rock 'n' roll beat.

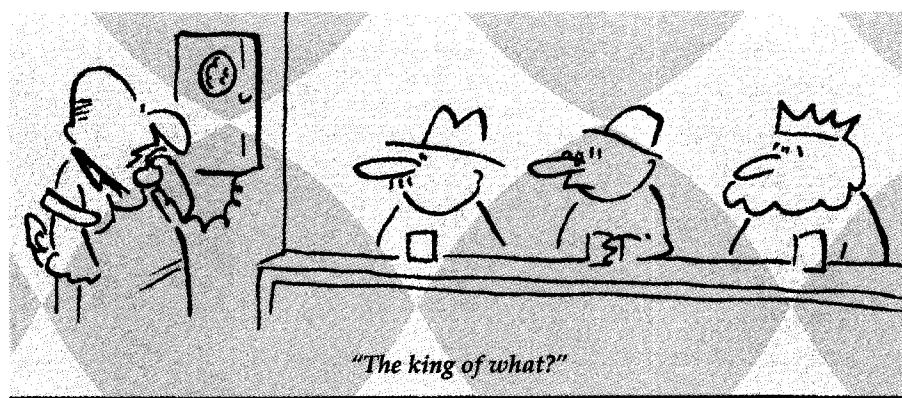
But why did it all come together and flourish around 1970?

At the end of the sixties, a great number of young people were confronting the possibility of early death in the Vietnam War and entertaining a ferocious contempt for what they took to be the corruption of the society that launched America into that war. The civil strife of generations produced a tendency among the young to turn away from an adult world "we never made." And this revulsion prompted an elevation of certain strains of childhood culture, not the least of them the "sick humor of the fifties." The Vietnam War finally ended and the civil war of generations was abraded by the passing of years, but the sick comedy strain was here to stay, and this strain has been more than a coloration of our recent bawdy pop culture. It is very nearly its ethos.

But why did all become so nasty in the last few years, so raucous, so mephitic? Even Jarry himself might be a bit shocked by Eminem and turn up his nose at "South Park."

Look again at that quote from Roger Shattuck. He writes of Jarry's obscenity and humor being a way of domesticating fear and pain. Yes, but once you have domesticated one aspect of fear and pain, you must move on to another. You must find a new nerve to hit, a new outrage to perpetrate. You must turn up the volume, find a new blasphemy to utter, discover the certain something still unsayable that you, and you alone, dare to say. Put purple blood in the next slaughter, crack a joke about child rape, suggest that necrophilia is just a matter of taste. Now, combine this need with the recent economic hypertrophy (we can't make just millions, it must be billions, or what will we say to our stockholders?) and you have a pretty reliable forecast of the future: Louder! Meaner! Nastier!

King Ubu has been surpassed but King Ubu still rules. □



Rand Richards Cooper



OZONERS

When the Fogmaster & spooning were king

Turn off your lights and drive left," our friendly booth guy said. "Soundtrack's on 88.1 FM."

It was only mid-June, but we were deep in the summer blockbuster movie doldrums. There was nothing we wanted to see. So we went to the drive-in.

I hadn't been there in ages; and if you're like most Americans, you haven't either. Seventy years have passed since Richard M. Hollingshead, after aiming a Kodak projector from his car roof at a screen nailed to a tree in his yard, made a patent application for "a novel construction in outdoor theaters whereby the transportation facilities to and from the theater are made to constitute an element of the seating facilities of the theater." Hollingshead's drive-in opened in Camden, New Jersey, in June of 1933, showing *Wife Beware* with Adolphe Menjou. Drive-ins—or ozoners, as they were quaintly called early on—boomed in the late '40s and '50s, stagnated through the '60s and '70s, and got decimated in the '80s. In my state, Connecticut, thirty-five of them (out of a mid-'60s peak of forty-two) were still operating in 1980. By 1985 the number was down to five. Today, just three remain.

My own childhood coincided with the tail end of the boom—I remember sitting beside my older sister in the jump seats of our parents' Checker, wailing away at *Old Yeller*. By the time I was a teenager, our drive-in had switched over to R- and X- rated films, unleashing startling visions of titanic eros on the horizon as you came out of the Stop N Shop nearby. The seedy image drive-ins acquired in the '70s partly obscured their origins as a family place. From the start, ads had pitched their convenience and informality ("Eat While You Look," "Knit While You Sit," "Leave Your Girdle at Home"), along with total family partic-

ipation; even reluctant Dad might be persuaded to come along, given a cigar and some beer in a bucket of ice. It was cheap family fun, no sitters required.

Molly and I don't have kids, and she was away for the weekend, so I drafted my sister and brother-in-law and their year-old daughter to go see *Tomb Raider*. On my way out the door, our bulldog, Bert, looked up with piteous eyes, so I took him too. We all arrived late, and when the radio in my sister's station wagon turned out to be on the blink, were forced to switch over to my car. A Geo Metro was not designed with movie-watching in mind. My brother-in-law, sitting in back, had to slump way down to see, shoving his legs up between our two front seats. My sister sat with the baby on her lap, breast-feeding. Bert blundered about, looking for a spot. Up on the screen, Angeline Jolie, dressed in judo-like pajamas, was doing some kind of indoor bungee jumping, swinging around on a huge rubber band in a vast palace atrium. Soon a squadron of mini-Darth Vaders broke in and began spraying automatic weapons fire.

"I can't see anything," my sister said. "Your windshield is all smeared."

I took my tee shirt off and tried to wipe the glass clear. Still "boinging" around on the rubber band, Angeline Jolie wasted the Darth Vader guys one by one with karate chops and cool stares.

"She must have had a lip job," my sister said. "Nobody has lips that puffy."

"I don't know," I said. "Jon Voight has puffy lips. Like father, like daughter."

"It's a lip job, I'm telling you."

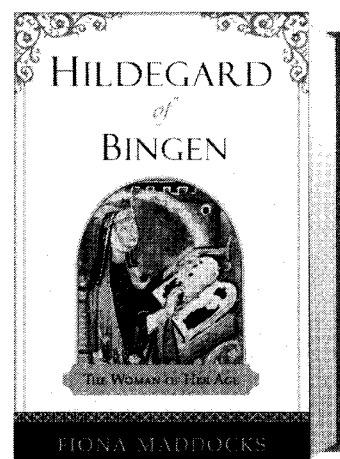
My brother-in-law agreed. And it wasn't just her lips that had been augmented, he pointed out.

"Quiet," my sister said. "I'm trying to watch."

"Hey, this is a drive-in."

"THERE IS
NO BETTER
INTRODUCTION
TO THIS MOTHER
SUPERIOR OF THE
MILLENNIUM."

—*The Sunday Telegraph*
(London)



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 Doubleday

He had a point. A drive-in was never about being quiet. From the start, a drive-in was about enjoying the privacy of your car. "Patrons can discuss, and cuss, the picture," observed the *Hollywood Reporter* in the 1940s. "They can sing the songs with the singers on the screen." I looked around. On one side of us, a group of six was having a little party on a blanket spread out behind their van. On the other, a young couple struggled to shush a wailing baby. I wondered what the scene was in the back rows, where in the old days, ushers with flashlights—the "park-and-pet police"—would enforce a no-spooning policy.

My sister wasn't feeling well. She and my brother-in-law traded places. She lay in the back seat and moaned ruefully about her sinus infection. "Maybe I should stand up," she said, "and it'll all drain to my feet." But she was too lazy. My brother-in-law and I repaired to the concession stand, following the aroma of vaporized fat. The menu listed fries and clam fritters, \$5 packs of cigarettes, and \$2.50 mosquito coils. "You got fries?" my sister said when we returned. "I thought you were going to eat healthy."

"This is healthy," he said. "Hey, it's a drive-in."

My sister and brother-in-law bailed out after the first show. I decided to stay a while. I had a folding chair in the trunk and set it up outside. Bert sprawled at my feet. The intermission cartoon featured a bun and hotdog in a comic routine, the bun attempting to coax the hotdog into doing tricks. I seemed to recall this same cartoon in a drive-in scene in *Grease*, playing in the background as John Travolta mournfully bays, *Candy, ba-a-by, I'm in misery...*

It was peaceful, sitting out in the open air. Ahead of me, the first two rows of spaces, long unused, had grown over, and the zone between screen and cars, where in olden days kiddie playgrounds and pony rides and miniature golf and vaudeville acts and jazz bands and Beautiful Child contests had lured families in hours before show time, was now a tangle of weeds. The semi-abandoned look of today's drive-in, with the old speaker poles tilting every which way, makes it hard to imagine how bustling a place it used to be. Picture usherettes on bicycles escorting you to your spot; carhops bringing food and baby-bottle warmers and cleaning your windshield; the Copiague, New York, drive-in held over twenty-five hundred cars and included a shuttle train that ferried cus-

tomers to various areas on the twenty-eight-acre site.

In their glory days, drive-ins expressed a particular, wacky strain of American imagination, their grandiosity and gadgetry revealing a culture captivated by technology. A drive-in in Phoenix, plagued by high temperatures, developed something called The Fogmaster, a system of fourteen-foot-high poles fitted out with water pipes and huge propellers that blew a fine mist across the lot. The Autoscope Drive-In in Albuquerque replaced the single giant screen with two hundred and sixty individual 3' x 5' monitors, with images conveyed from a central projector by a fantastic series of mirrors. At the Theater Motel in Brattleboro, Vermont, you could watch from your room through huge picture windows, while the Winter Haven, Florida, ozoner was built on the shores of a lake, so boaters could moviego while fishing. Asbury Park, New Jersey, was the home of Ed Brown's Drive-In and Fly-In, with capacity for five hundred cars and twenty-five small planes, which would land at the adjacent airstrip and taxi to the last row. Looking back, you can't help but feel affection for a time when multitasking reflected not a strategy for personal conquest, but a zany fantasy of combining unlikelys. One Memphis ozoner doubled as a Laundromat—turn in your dirty clothes on the way in, pick them up clean when you leave. Do this—while you do that!

The drive-in was geared to a particular, midcentury moment in American life: the baby boom and rush to the suburbs; low-cost real estate; the romance of big roomy cars; and the advent of a huge class of people wealthy enough to afford some entertainment of a summer eve, but frugal enough to want it cheap. When these factors changed, the equation no longer worked, and now the drive-in, once a showcase for novelties of every kind, has itself become a novelty.

I sat there in my lawn chair. The cartoon hot dog jumped into the bun. My dog snored. The next movie began, and from outside my car, I couldn't quite make out the words. What better way to drift through the blockbuster dol-



Theology at the barricades

Eugene McCarraher

Catholic scholars
have taken the dynamite
of the church,
have wrapped it up
in nice phraseology,
placed it in an hermetic container
and sat on the lid.
It is about time
to blow the lid off...

PETER MAURIN

Few today can imagine that Catholic social thought has the pyrotechnic promise that Peter Maurin identified in his "easy essay," "Blowing the Dynamite." However idiosyncratic, the Catholic Workers' coupling of doctrinal orthodoxy and radical politics epitomized a faith in the church as an exemplary form of human community, an imperfect but anticipatory effort, in the words of the Catholic sociologist Paul Hanly Furfey, "to reproduce heaven on earth."

Among contemporary Catholics of all political stripes there seems little desire to recreate this radical ecclesial and political imagination. In short, the lid seems firmly sealed. Can it ever be pried loose again? A new movement of intellectual, ecclesial, and political regeneration calling itself "radical orthodoxy" offers some hope that the dynamite can still be ignited. These flamboyant advocates of change have already made the pages of *Time* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. That's not surprising given some of their virtuoso intellectual performances. Michael Budde's well-received (*Magic Kingdom* (Westview Press, 1997) is a good example. With a formidable grasp of both theology and neo-Marxist theory, Budde sketches the political economy of culture, demonstrates its corrosive impact on spiritual life (primarily

but not exclusively through the sheer volume of commercial imagery), and suggests forms of resistance. He is especially devastating on the co-opting of church leaders. From the Archdiocese of Chicago's corporate-designed restructuring of educational and pastoral resources, to the intellectual mediocrity of episcopal, curial, and papal pronouncements on the mass media, to the proliferation of Vatican and other product tie-ins, licensing agreements, and marketing ventures, church leaders are, Budde charges, tragically "remaking the church in the image and likeness of the global culture industries." And that, Budde and his compatriots argue, is a far more fundamental betrayal of the gospel than sexual immorality or ecclesiological deviance.

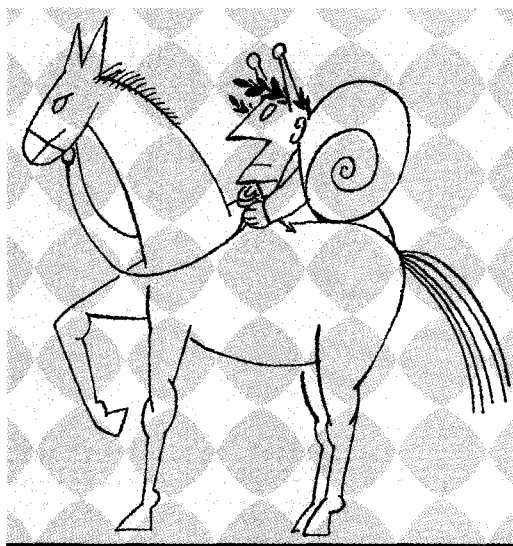
Or take Graham Ward's *Cities of God* (Routledge, 2000). Promising to "read the signs of the times through the grammar of the Christian faith," Ward studies numerous artifacts of postmodern culture—Epcot Center, *Leaving Las Vegas*, sex shops, cyberspace, and virtual reality, to cite a few—and concludes that modernity's effort to create "a world

without transcendent values" is rapidly and desperately imploding. The book is a tour de force that invokes the gamut of cultural criticism from church fathers to proponents of queer theory.

"Radical orthodoxy" is to some extent a British import. Its foremost figures are associated with the University of Cambridge: John Milbank (now at the University of Virginia), whose *Theology and Social Theory* (Blackwell, 1990) could be taken as the urtext of the movement; Catherine Pickstock, whose *After Writing* (Blackwell, 1997) combines history, theology, and philosophy to argue for the unavoidable religious culmination of Western thought, what she calls "the liturgical consummation of philosophy"; and Ward, who has written or edited several incisive works on theology, philosophy, and critical theory. The three co-edited *Radical Orthodoxy* (Routledge, 1999), a collection of essays by British and American contributors devoted to a Christian reconstruction of epistemology, ethics, sexuality, politics, aesthetics, and other subjects.

In this country, Stanley Hauerwas of Duke is the best-known representative, followed by Michael Baxter of Notre Dame (a Holy Cross priest and former student of Hauerwas's); Budde, a political scientist at De Paul; and William Cunningham of Saint Thomas, whose *Torture and Eucharist* (1998) is a searching theological examination of modern political thought. Budde and Robert Brimlow, a philosopher at Saint John Fisher College, have recently edited *The Church as Counterculture* (SUNY, 2000), a collection that could be read as a more accessible American counterpart to *Radical Orthodoxy*. (I'll be quoting these and other sources largely without attribution.)

The names and movements cited



by the radical orthodox compose a motley syllabus in twentieth-century theology, philosophy, and social thought: Alasdair MacIntyre, from whom they borrow a mutable sense of tradition and a twilight sensibility; George Lindbeck, "post-liberal" theology, and the "Yale school" of religious studies; "liberation theology"; the Catholic Workers; Jacques Maritain and "integral humanism"; Anglican socialists such as Maurice Reckitt, R. H. Tawney, and J. N. Figgis; "supernatural sociologists" like Paul Hanly

Furfey and Luigi Sturzo; the *nouvelle theologie* that embraced Maurice Blondel and Henri de Lubac; the "politics of Jesus" espoused by the Mennonite John Howard Yoder. Add Hans Urs von Balthasar, as well as French heavyweights like Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Gillian Rose, and Luce Irigaray, and you have the intellectual pedigree of the movement.

The editors of *Radical Orthodoxy* assert a "commitment to creedal Christianity" that entails a "return to patristic and me-

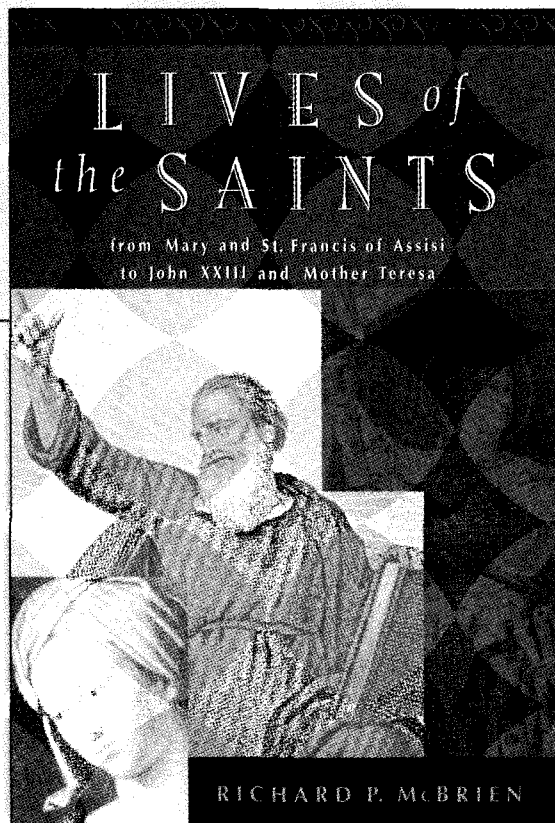
dieval roots," especially to Augustine. Faith must mean a distinctive thought and practice. This creedal fidelity provides the intellectual and ecclesial foundation from which radicals attempt to "criticize modern society, culture, politics, art, science, and philosophy with an unprecedented boldness." And, like good students of MacIntyre, they recognize that this project includes "rethink[ing] the tradition."

However abstruse this enterprise can get—one finds references to everyone from Gregory of Nyssa to the neo-Platonists to Nietzsche—radical orthodoxy's most visible concern is the church. Because discipleship is, "an inherently ecclesiocentric proposition," the state of the church is a recurrent occasion of analysis, anger, and hope. Their jeremiads about the dilapidated condition of Christianity, especially American Catholicism, often sound as if they belong in the pages of the reactionary magazine *Crisis*. Yet the diagnosis of our religious ills differs sharply from the conservative critique. The new radicals contend that the contemporary erosion of the church represents merely the most advanced stage of an illness called "Constantinianism"—the church's wrong-headed and suicidal offer to be a "sponsor of the world," a reliable partner in the creation and maintenance of economies, empires, and cultures defined apart from the gospel. Under Constantinianism, personhood is understood as self-mastery, possession and ownership are elevated as moral ideals, and power and manipulation are relied on to maintain an unloving and tenuous peace.

In this context, secularity emerges as the real enemy. Tracing its origins to late medieval theologians whose work was completed by modern social scientists and philosophers, the creation of the secular insists that society, economics, politics, and so on are independent of divine power and ecclesial supervision. By "policing the sublime," in Milbank's apt phrase—by redefining Christian life in "spiritual," private terms, and by recasting the church as a spiritual entity with no claims on the secular—secular reason enables capital and the state to proceed unchecked.

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Represented by John Courtney Murray and Reinhold Niebuhr, modern "Constantinianism" proscribes Christian language and suppresses the political character of the church and the gospel. Baxter, for example, notes that Murray's work is "remarkably bereft of references to Christ, the sacraments, Scripture, the saints, and other tradition-specific terms and categories." As a consequence, Murray ends up affirming "the myth of the modern liberal state as a religiously neutral institutional arrangement." Hauerwas and Milbank indict Niebuhr and "Christian realism" on the same charges. Niebuhr, Murray, and their acolytes effect a subtle transfer of allegiance from the church to the market and the state. Capitalism—even the "democratic capitalism" hosannahed from the pews of neoconservatism—is identified as the principal vessel of secularism and spiritual atrophy. Drawing on the disparate histories of guilds, liturgies, theology, and classical economics, Milbank and Pickstock compose rich and penetrating accounts of capitalism as it is linked to unprecedented violence. Capitalism embodies a "mean little heresy" that destroyed a guild system in which work was endowed with a liturgical character. As a consequence, its pinch-penny "virtues" (frugality, sobriety, punctuality, sexual restraint) have become the marrow of Christian divinity, and its displacement of charity by accumulation the defining principle of social relations.

The only hope for the world, the radicals claim, lies in a revitalized church and a theology remade (or rather recovered) as social theory and cultural criticism. If "to be a Christian must mean to live in the church, to be formed by the church," then salvation is the social participation in the "body of Christ"—an old but venerable ecclesiological parlance. For radical orthodoxy, there is no *individual* salvation to which one attaches *social* implications; as Hauerwas puts it, "the church is a social ethic," anticipating Milbank's assertion that "salvation is only in common."

Although church membership is open to all, it must be, as Walter Bruegge-

mann puts it with superb nuance, "inclusive, but not casual." It mandates scriptural and theological instruction, individual and communal prayer, liturgy, and mutual encouragement. The church, Milbank writes, is the communal anticipation of the heavenly city, a caravan of brothers and sisters "on pilgrimage through this temporary world." Marked by the imperfect and incessant practices of charity and forgiveness, the church is "a particular historical practice" that resists and overthrows the

earthly city through "the imagination in action of a peaceful, reconciled social order." It's not unwarranted to note the affinities between radical orthodoxy and Marxism. For Milbank, Ward, Baxter, and the rest, theology becomes a form of historical and revolutionary theory, and the church assumes a role akin to that of the proletariat and the party. Milbank contends that theology reads "all history as...anticipation, or sinful refusal of, salvation"—a salvation (recall) defined by inclusion in the body

THE SECOND ONE THOUSAND YEARS

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of Christ, a revolutionary vanguard and the destination of history itself.

These new proponents of “orthodoxy” emphatically reject the neoconservative baptism of capitalism and just as clearly repudiate the accommodation with capitalism enjoined by Catholic liberals. While indebted to Marxism, they are deeply ambivalent about and even hostile toward liberation theology. Milbank demonstrates how Gutierrez, Segundo, and the brothers Boff do nothing more than swing a thurible around the totem of “progress” constructed by liberals and Marxists. Nor do they genuflect reflexively before the social encyclicals and pastoral letters. Milbank contends that much of modern Catholic social teaching is a “grotesque hybrid” of liberal market economics and organicist, patriarchal social ideals, underwritten by discredited notions of essentialism and natural law.

Still, despite all the brave talk about “unprecedented boldness” and the “political nature of the gospel,” radical orthodoxy hasn’t displayed much in the way of political acumen or imagination. Budde insists that discipleship is “incompatible with voting, holding state office, and other direct state-supportive practices”—in other words, incompatible with the only large-scale and effective means we currently have to mitigate the damage he spends an entire book detailing. Baxter’s celebration of the Catholic Worker raises flags, for this observer, about the movement’s uncritical and debilitating technophobia. Cunningham’s “eucharistic anarchism,” while it rightly roots Christian social life in liturgy, provides no guidance about production or consumption, and Milbank’s Christian socialism goes nowhere beyond gestures toward John Ruskin and Eric Gill. I suspect that some radicals would not be averse to refurbishing anarcho-syndicalist or guild socialist schemes that sought direct worker control of production and the revival of artisanal creativity. (That’s why I’d suggest less Derrida and more Simone Weil.) But while such gestures remain bold and enticing in comparison with the exhaustion of the secular left, they’re not

unprecedented, and their precursors at least spelled out in some detail what they wanted.

Some of radical orthodoxy’s cultural criticism is all too tiresome and predictable. Marianne Sawicki, for instance, conjuring up the “paleochurch” and its diminutive resistance to Rome, calls for “small-scale refusals” of the “pomp and glours of middle-class life.” Well, we *don’t* live in Rome; we live in a culture that retains traces, often strong ones, of a moral lexicon to which Christians can appeal. Second, absent any concrete translation of ecclesiology into a politics of work, technology, race, or sexuality, “small-scale refusal”—along with “eucharistic anarchism” or “Christian socialism”—looks like a dreamy and self-righteous form of resignation. Third, the rhetoric of “pomp and glamour” belongs to a tradition of imprecation against “materialism” that’s critically unconvincing and theologically threadbare. The life of the contemporary bourgeoisie is a wearying frenzy of work, work, spending, and work, with some time left over for civic duties, commodified leisure, sex, family, and—maybe—a spiritual life. Anyone acquainted with Juliet Schor’s “overworked” and “overspent” Americans, or with Lendol Calder’s brilliant *Financing the American Dream*, knows that pleasure and gratification are often the last things consumers experience.

I’d also propose that secularism has become a misleading and even inaccurate term. Assaults on the secular effectively hit only a limited range of targets—namely, intellectuals, outside of whose uncharmed circles religion is as vibrant, if not as Christian, as ever. If secularism is the denial or negation of the sacred in the name of reason and science, then American culture—with its spiritual smorgasbord of religions, denominations, sects, New Age groups, and individual collages—is hardly secular. Thus, I’d suggest that the terms secularism and materialism are of limited value in understanding the erosion of Christian commitment or the enchantments of capitalist culture. I’d propose instead Augustine’s notion of sin as “perversion”—the misdirection of our love and energy. Because it under-

stands and does not despise our bodily desires, the concept of “perversion” holds together the good and the evil of some of our most insistent and potentially blessed longings.

Which is to say that radical orthodoxy ought to get out into the world. The movement is still too socially incubated in academia, too marinated in postmodernist palaver. If the church is indeed a new way of being, then that life must radiate its redemptive energy throughout our fallen but still beautiful world. Through its theory and practice of ecclesiology, radical orthodoxy has an opportunity to solve one of the persistent dilemmas of politically engaged intellectuals: how to link the pursuits of a professional intelligentsia with the daily experience and critical power of workers (blue- and white-collar), farmers, and others. The radically orthodox must discover and create venues outside of conferences, seminars, or e-mail lists; they must grasp the hands of labor unions, feminists, gay and lesbian activists, and other secular or religious groups. If they don’t—if they remain content, as I fear some of them do, to carp and posture before gatherings of the anointed—then the movement will become at best a beloved clique and at worst another academic vaudeville show.

Such an outcome would be a sorry waste of talent and opportunity. For radical orthodoxy revives Chesterton’s hope to sing both the “Marseillaise” and the “Magnificat,” and repeats his call to the romance of orthodoxy. Like him, the radical orthodox assert that genuine faith is an adventure and not a possession, an insistence on love and peace as the very architecture of creation, a state of rebellion against every false god and perverted longing. It offers us the chance to lift the lid off Catholicism and detonate the charge of the gospel. □

Eugene McCarraher teaches humanities and history at Villanova University. He is the author of *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought* (Cornell University Press, 2000). He is currently working on *The Enchantments of Mammon: Corporate Capitalism and the American Moral Imagination*.

Oracle at the Fed

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Carlos Lozada

On the cover of their April 21 issue, the editors of *The Economist* featured a ripped, buff, Baywatchesque Alan Greenspan plunging through knee-deep seawater in a bathing suit and tank top, with a life buoy in hand and a whistle dangling around his neck. The cover line—as if we didn't get it—read “Greenspan to the rescue.”

Rescues have been a matter of course for Greenspan during his nearly fourteen years at the helm of the Federal Reserve. The October 1987 Wall Street crash hit a scant two months after his appointment to the Fed. During the 1990s, Mexico, Asia, Russia, and Brazil all suffered major financial crises that threatened the United States. And in late 1998, the near collapse of Long-Term Capital Management, a major U.S. hedge fund, endangered the entire U.S. financial system. By contrast, the current

slowdown in the U.S. economy might rank as a bit of a yawner. Yet, as in the previous cases, Greenspan remains on patrol, slashing short-term interest rates again last month for the sixth time this year, seeking to keep the record 124-month expansion—and his legacy—afloat.

Greenspan's role in guiding the U.S. economy has transformed the chairman into the rarest of creatures: the celebrity economist, his every enigmatic statement endlessly parsed by a Greenspan-obsessed press. Now, as if to certify the chairman's icon status, these two biographies promise insight into the man lurking behind the retro eyewear and the tortured econspeak. Painstakingly researched and telling a story that is spread over the course of Greenspan's life, Justin Martin's *Greenspan* offers a more comprehensive account than Bob Woodward's *Maestro*, which dwells mainly on Greenspan's years with the Fed. These works portray an aloof, reserved man driven by free-market ideology but perhaps even more by a keen eye for political advancement and self-preservation.

According to Martin, a former staff writer for *Fortune*, Greenspan's early years in Depression-era New York gave few inklings of the path his life would take. Although he showed a knack for numbers early on, Greenspan's first love was music. He played the clarinet in his high school orchestra and, after a year at Julliard, in 1944 the eighteen-year-old Greenspan joined a swing band, earning \$62 a week playing gigs from the Catskills to New Orleans. Hardly a likely career track for the man who would be Fed chairman.

Yet economics held early sway with Greenspan. “During set breaks,” Martin writes, “he started reading treatises on economics borrowed from the public library. The topic gripped him.” The decision to embrace economics full-time was vintage Greenspan, the product of a clear-eyed, cost-benefit analysis. “I was a pretty good amateur musician,” Greenspan recalled years later, “but I was average as a professional....So I decided that, if that was as far as I could go, I was in the wrong profession.”

At New York University and Columbia, Greenspan honed his economics skills and earned a reputation as a tireless data hound. Columbia professor Arthur Burns instilled in Greenspan a deep distrust of government intervention in economic affairs, as did novelist and free-market proselytizer Ayn Rand, whom Greenspan first met in his late twenties. Writing for Rand's *The Objectivist* newsletter in the 1960s, Greenspan condemned consumer-protection and antitrust laws and even questioned his future employer's independence,



decrying the Fed as “government sponsored, controlled, and supported.”

After several years running a successful economic consulting firm in New York, Greenspan put his free-market thinking to work for the government. At the prodding of Burns, Greenspan joined Richard Nixon’s 1968 presidential campaign as a domestic-policy advisor and, six years later, he accepted the chairmanship of the president’s Council of Economic Advisors (CEA), being sworn in just hours before Nixon’s res-

ignation. During a time of high inflation and unemployment, the neophyte chairman soon revealed his political naiveté. At a conference examining the impact of inflation on income security, Greenspan defended the fledgling Ford administration against charges that its policies hurt the poor. “If you really wanted to examine who percentagewise is hurt the most in their incomes,” Greenspan argued, “it is the Wall Street brokers. I mean their incomes have gone down the most.” The public outcry was as fierce

as it was predictable, and Greenspan later apologized for his remarks before Congress. “He’d put his worst foot forward,” Martin explains, “the bionic accountant, numbers-over-emotions aspect of his personality.” It was a lesson Greenspan would not forget.

Yet Greenspan also displayed some shrewd politicking at the CEA. Running counter to institutional tradition, whereby the top three CEA economists were essentially equals who divided up the plum duties, Greenspan “jealously guarded the most attractive and high-visibility assignments” and quietly made himself personally indispensable to Ford. This practice soon bred resentment among Greenspan’s high-level staffers, some of whom resigned. Greenspan’s tendency to put himself before his institution would reemerge in the years to come.

In 1981–83, Greenspan gained prominence when he successfully chaired a bipartisan blue-ribbon commission that provided recommendations on how to forestall a crisis in the Social Security system. This performance, along with his strong Republican ties and his well-known mastery of obscure economic data, made him an easy choice to replace Paul Volcker as Fed chairman in August 1987.

Bob Woodward’s *Maestro* picks up the story here, recounting the politics behind the Greenspan Fed. Predictably, Woodward laces the narrative with an intensely Beltway sensibility, deploying A-list dinner-party scenes and dropping curse words in high places to establish the book’s insider bona fides. However, its D.C. clichés aside, *Maestro* effectively demonstrates Greenspan’s ability to overshadow an institution with the force of his personality once again—and lead the media astray in the process.

As chair of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC)—the group of high-ranking officials in charge of setting interest-rate policy—Greenspan frequently invoked the need for the committee to appear unified before the financial markets. Consensus, he argued, would ensure the credibility and effectiveness of the group’s policy decisions. He also reminded FOMC members of their awesome responsibility: “If it ever gets to

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the point where this committee is either in disarray or perceived to be in disarray, there is no other institution in this government that can substitute for us."

In practice, however, Greenspan's insistence on agreement meant simply that everyone had better agree with the chairman. Over time, few questioned his authority. The occasional independent-minded Fed officials who dared challenge Greenspan—such as Clinton appointee and Princeton luminary Alan Blinder, who in the mid-1990s had the audacity to question Greenspan's rate hikes—found themselves frozen out of the policy-making process. Much like Greenspan's CEA colleagues years before, a frustrated Blinder soon left the Fed.

His control firmly established, Greenspan became synonymous with the Federal Reserve and, at the same time, the undisputed symbol of the U.S. economic boom of the 1990s. This conflating of the man, the institution, and the economy has produced what Martin and Woodward both call "the cult" of Alan Greenspan. Indeed, the political and media obsession with Greenspan makes the notion of a different chairman appear ridiculous.

The media focus is particularly ironic because Greenspan—long past his pity-the-poor-stockbroker gaffe—has become a master of misdirection. His famous "irrational exuberance" speech of 1996, in which he overtly (and unsuccessfully) tried to talk down the buoyant stock market, proved the exception rather than the rule. More often, Woodward explains, Greenspan practices what he calls "constructive ambiguity." For instance, after a June 1995 press conference on the state of the economy, news interpretations diverged wildly. "Greenspan Sees Chance of Recession" deduced the *New York Times*. "Recession Is Unlikely, Greenspan Concludes," declared the *Washington Post*. Greenspan reveled in the confusion. Indeed, as he once told Congress, "I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."

The notion of any other public servant deliberately leading Congress, the

media, and the public astray would seem anathema to U.S. democratic sensibilities, yet Greenspan's reputation and power are such that many politicians and reporters consider his obfuscations normal, charming, even amusing.

The cult of Greenspan raises obvious questions that neither author addresses satisfactorily: Is there a danger in depending on Greenspan too much? What happens after Greenspan? When a critical institution like the Federal Reserve is so identified with a single individual, how might financial markets react to a different hand at the helm, particularly

when the inevitable economic crisis hits our shores? Will irrational gloom take hold?

In this narrow sense, perhaps the current economic downturn is a good thing. By puncturing the mythology of Alan Greenspan and revealing his inability to rush to the rescue every time, the prospect of a successor—inevitable as it is daunting—may not seem so frightening. There will be life after Greenspan. □

Carlos Lozada is the associate editor of *Foreign Policy* magazine in Washington, D.C.

GETTING TO TRUTH BY LYING

A Stay against Confusion
Essays on Faith and Fiction
Ron Hansen
HarperCollins, \$25, 288 pp.

Suzanne Keen

Ron Hansen's *Mariette in Ecstasy* (1991) remains one of my favorite American novels of the 1990s. In it Hansen presents a delicately balanced narrative of a teenaged postulant who receives the stigmata, to the consternation and even embarrassment of her religious community. Without tipping his hand to reveal "what really happened" in any crude sense, Hansen scrutinizes the reactions of the community with detachment and a lyrical economy that paradoxically heightens the reader's response to Mariette's experiences. It is a beautiful book about religious mystery that sustains both skeptical and mystical interpretations. Nothing about the presentation of that novel indicated that Hansen was Catholic, unlike his collection *A Stay against Confusion*, which arrives bedecked with blurbs comparing him to Flannery O'Connor, Thomas Mer-

ton, Walker Percy, Annie Dillard, and Andre Dubus. While I agree with novelist Valerie Sayers's assertion in *Commonweal* (May 4) that the duty of the Catholic novelist is to *tell a good story*, I also acknowledge the pressure applied by the label. What makes a writer who happens to be a Catholic into a Catholic writer? Hansen approaches this question directly.

Hansen has written six other works of fiction, including a book for children and six screenplays, and he has edited several books of American short fiction. Now the Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., Professor in the Arts and Humanities at Santa Clara University, he is a critically acclaimed writer in his own right. In his preface, Hansen tells two tales about the origins of his vocation. Both are sited firmly within Catholic worlds. In the first, the five-year-old Hansen recognizes in a suddenly familiar Gospel reading the power of repetition and the centrality of narrative. From the Mass he learned that "storytelling mattered," that to the faithful the return to "the same stunning stories" made the past live in the here and now and bound individuals into a sharing group. The purpose of storytelling in this version is clear; it encourages Christians to "continue the public ministry of Christ in this world." This model of vocation sets a standard so high that perhaps only Gerard Manley Hopkins him-

self could meet it, though it also allows us to observe that those original Catholic writers Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John sure told a good story, still fresh and functional after two millennia.

Fiction, however, springs from lying and thievery, as Hansen's second vocational anecdote acknowledges. Hearing from a fellow kindergartner a description of "a pressure-sensitive prie-dieu" in a European cathedral, which lit up a crucifix when people knelt upon it, Hansen swipes the idea and invents a hallway closet chapel, complete with miraculous special effects. The gratifying response of the kindergarten teacher encourages the child, just on the verge of reading, "to alter facts that seemed imposed and arbitrary, to intensify scenes and situations with additions and falsifications, and to ameliorate the dull and slack commodities of experience with the zest of the wildest imaginings." The very traits of fiction that dismayed Plato and provoked a dour response from evangelical Victorians become the offices of a vocation characterized by Hansen as "exalted and sacred."

Hansen makes two moves to justify this vision of authorship, one out of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* and the other out of George Eliot. Sidney teaches us that the poet never lies because he never affirms; instead of telling falsehoods about the brazen world we live in, he creates an alternative golden world. In Hansen's words, fiction "holds up to the light, fathoms, simplifies, and refines those existential truths that, without such interpretation, seem all too secret, partial, and elusive." The artist as alchemist makes gold out of the impure materials of human life. As Hansen writes of his composition of *Mariette in Ecstasy*, "cribbing and stealing from hundreds of sources, I finally allowed my factual sources to be distorted and transmuted by figurative language, forgetfulness, or by the personalities of the fictional characters."

These made-up, swiped, or patchworked personalities become the vehicle for fiction's ethical work. George Eliot articulates the view that narrative fiction uses characters to cultivate the reader's sympathetic imagination. Thus fiction

is an antidote to egoism and a device for encountering otherness. Hansen's version holds that "reading attentively, connecting our lives with those of fictional characters, choosing ethically and emotionally just as they do or in contradistinction to them, we enter the realm of the spirit where we simultaneously discover our likeness to others and our difference, our uniqueness." What makes Hansen's writerly vocation a Catholic one is the belief (Eliot would not have shared it) that reading fiction prepares an individual to recognize "a horizon beyond which abides the One who is the creator and context of our existence." Further, if writing fashions symbols properly, it offers readers an assurance of life's significance, and teaches the formula for happiness (first be; then love), it can, in Hansen's vision, become sacramental in itself.

It is perhaps inevitable that the essays following such an ambitious definition of vocation should fall short of the goal: interested readers should turn to Hansen's fiction. *A Stay against Confusion* collects occasional pieces (essays, talks, and meditations) in which Hansen discusses one aspect or another of his twinned topics, faith and fiction. The essays include personal reflections, a tribute to his mentor John Gardner, and workmanlike pieces on Ignatius of Loyola, Hopkins, a Tolstoy story, and the film *Babette's Feast*. These are joined by meditations on the Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador, the Eucharist, the prayer *Anima Christi*, and the stigmata. It is perhaps an inadvertent effect of the opening discussion of a writer's vocation that these nonfiction pieces at times invite a skeptical response. We know that as a novelist Hansen cribs, steals, distorts (as he should!), but what are we to make of the whiff of John Gardner's pipe tobacco, smelt by the author after learning of Gardner's death? Olfactory hallucination? Just the embellishment of an already quite touching tribute? Or does Hansen believe in ghosts? While I was moved by the results of Hansen's impulsive prayer to Gerard Manley Hopkins, the piece on the stigmata struck me as credulous, in contrast with the novel Hansen worked up from the same materials.

But these are small quibbles about a book whose satisfactions arise out of its variety. In an effort to unify the collection, Hansen provides a headnote to each of the pieces. These brief introductions provide background, often autobiographical, and I enjoyed them as much as anything in the book. Together with the meditations on Cain and Abel and the Eucharist, they sketched out the map of a memoir that would be worth reading. Literary editor and writer Paul Elie has written of our need for memoirs of Catholic *adulthood*, a rare item in a genre dominated by recollections of childhood. A frank account of a career spent writing "a faith-inspired fiction" would do more than *A Stay against Confusion* to illuminate the relationship between Catholic faith and American fiction. □

Suzanne Keen, a frequent contributor to *Commonweal*, teaches English at Washington and Lee University.

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

tors, faculty, students, benefactors, and friends of Catholic higher education need to stand with their theologians, whether or not they receive a mandate, identify and condemn vigilantism, and resist ecclesiastical pressure. Second, serious Catholics have to stop responding passively to actions taken by the Vatican and bishops under pressure from small irresponsible groups. They need to organize to ensure that the formation of Catholic public opinion and the shaping of ecclesiastical policy do not take place on uncontested ground. The evolution of the mandate question teaches at least this: with the decline of religious orders who once insulated the rest of us from the raw politics of the church, we who share Van Allen's care for the integrity of the community of faith will have to confront the hard reality that, if we do nothing in that arena of church affairs, we will almost always lose.

DAVID O'BRIEN
Worcester, Mass

The writer is director of the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Culture at College of the Holy Cross.

Dissin' the Dalai

I was taken aback by Brian Doyle's piece on His Holiness the Dalai Lama ("Dalai Lama in Oregon," June 15). I know Mr. Doyle is having a bit of fun, but his humor comes at the expense of Tibet's cultural, religious, and political dignity.

Why does he refer to the Dalai Lama as "the head of a state that is and isn't a state" rather than as the exiled leader of the Tibetan people and spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism? And why such an oblique reference to China as an "immense and hungry neighbor" without any direct acknowledgment of China's oppression of Tibet, her people, and her religion?

And the tone! After offering up an inane physical description of the Dalai Lama, Doyle ends his thought with "the Dalai Lama being a head of state and all." The "and all" struck me as both unnecessary and derisive. Ditto the caveat "as the Tibetans say carefully" with which Doyle concludes his description of how the young Lhamo Dhondup was recognized as the reincarnation of his predecessor. Without actually coming out and speaking plainly, Doyle implies something scripted or less than kosher about the Lama's selection.

Anyone who has heard the Dalai Lama speak or has read his teachings knows that he not only respects the world's religions, but that he embraces life and its blows with humor and forgiveness. In keeping with his spirit, I'm working on smiling my way out of this essay.

TIINA ALEMAN
Jersey City, N.J.

Get used to it

In his commencement address at the University of Notre Dame, President George W. Bush reached out to Catholics across ideological lines. And for doing so he gets slammed by *Commonweal* ("Pope George on the Road," June 15).

What seems to be bothering *Commonweal* most of all is the receptive audience Bush is getting from Catholics. Get used to it. Bush is proving to be to Catholics what Bill Clinton proved to be to African Americans: though he's of a different stock, he's coming across as the genuine article. That may be a scary

scenario to some, but to others it's reason to celebrate. WILLIAM A. DONOHUE
New York, N.Y.

The writer is president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

Bush is right

Your May 4 Et Cetera "Pope George and His Court" is critical of President George W. Bush for seeking the Catholic vote. Certainly, many Catholics have good reason to vote for him. Specifically, he opposes abortions, partial-birth abortions, and he is working out the details on his proposal to see that aid for the needy is in some practical way also distributed through faith-based organizations. Catholics can support these concepts. The Democratic Party does not.

Then you allege that "Bush has sent to Congress his wholly disingenuous budget proposal in which tax cuts are designed...to redistribute wealth to the rich rather than the poor." This overlooks what the Bush plan really is. Since the government has collected more than it needs, Bush's plan returns the overpayment to those who paid the tax. It seems only fair and right. If Congress feels that it requires more money to meet the needs of the poor, then such proposals should be handled as particular new legislation. They should have nothing to do with refunding tax payments.

As a subscriber to *Commonweal* for over fifty years, I find it very distasteful that you are becoming a spokesman for the Democratic Party.

WILLIAM J. GUSTE, JR.
New Orleans, La.

Send in the clowns

Paul Baumann makes a good point when he recommends that we avail ourselves of those rare moments of serendipitous transcendence that grace our existence ("Crossing 125th Street," June 1). However, much as we may savor comic relief in our otherwise droll lives, the circus is no fun for the animals. Circus animals endure untold hardships and abuse. There is nothing majestic about an elephant being taken from its native

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land, chained up, and trained with picks to do things completely against its nature. Laugh at clowns if you wish, but please, let the elephants live out their lives in the jungle, where God intended them to be. I respectfully direct the author to section 2415 et seq. of the *Catechism* that deals with the integrity of God's creation.

RONNIE ROSENBERG
Fairbanks, Alaska

What energy savings?

The editorial, "Bush-league Energy Plan" (June 1), has a lot of good points, but three that are not so helpful. First is the ad hominem attack on Bush and Cheney, which inflames the emotions and thus obscures the vision.

The second is the incomplete description of the DOE report, "Scenarios for a Clean Energy Future." This report is an attempt to estimate the energy consumption reductions that would follow from a series of national policy changes designed to accelerate the development of energy efficiency technologies. Al-

though it tries to estimate the economic value of the energy saved, the report makes no attempt to estimate the costs of the policy changes. The editorial rightly points out that people with low or fixed incomes, along with small farmers and other economic entities with no societal bargaining power, "are hit especially hard."

The editorial says that the DOE report "argues that easy-to-achieve efficiency standards save enormous amounts of energy resources." Although one can quibble analytically with "enormous," there is no doubt that greater efficiency saves energy. What was unsaid is that most higher-efficiency products cost more—and in many cases a lot more—than less-efficient ones. Also unsaid is the effect of increased efficiency on the future price of energy; the price will not rise as fast, and so the incentive to increase efficiency is weakened. To achieve the savings, therefore, would mean increased governmental interference in the marketplace, not an unmixed blessing, as several previous interferences by our own government have shown (for example, gasoline lines in 1973–74 and 1979–80, the result of oil price controls). Without such increased interference, the energy savings become less "enormous."

Third is the fact, also left unsaid in your editorial, that even if the "enormous" savings in energy were realized, there would still be a major need to increase energy supplies.

In sum, energy efficiency is not the national policy value that should govern Christians. The impact of the problems, and of the proposed solutions, on the more vulnerable members of the society should be. And when that becomes primary, the preferred solutions become much more complex.

DAVID E. GUSHEE
Vienna, Va.

The editors reply:

There are more areas of agreement between our editorial and Mr. Gushee than he acknowledges. The editorial never posits efficiency as the total solution to America's long-range energy needs: we argue that a balanced agen-

da to reduce demand and increase supply is the best solution. The supply-oriented Bush plan lacks such balance.

Gushee attends to the possible economic downside of increasing efficiency. But, as the current oil refinery crush shows, if efficiency is neglected, then so are incentives for infrastructure that ensure ongoing energy profits and security.

By invoking the spectre of 1970s "gasoline lines" and "price controls," Gushee's real quarrel appears to be with Thomas Higgins's view that the California energy crisis was caused by ill-designed deregulation ("The Politics of Power," June 1).

As for ad hominem, we don't see it. When words and processes (such as the unbalanced and secretive Energy Task Force meetings, and its selective use of DOE experts) are misleading, it is neither unchristian nor mean to ask for a higher standard.

Race matters

Reading Ed Marciniak and Don Wycliff ("New Vocabulary of Race Relations," June 1) my spirit soars. Reading about New York City's Board of Education (or any big city's educational system) I am plunged into despair.

Victories have been won in America's war against racism but we now have a stalemate with most of the younger generation of African Americans (and Hispanic Americans) being lost in an educational system that fails to educate.

The blame rests not only with the teachers' union but also with a city government and education bureaucracy that seems to breed chaos. The New York City school system has averaged a new chancellor every few years. All of the chancellors bring their own ideas, plans, programs that they start and—poof—they are gone and their programs wither and die.

So, let us cheer for what has been accomplished since the Civil Rights Act and the economic boom of the 1990s, but this viewer looks at our educational system for minorities and our technology-dominated economy and wonders if our race relations have really improved that much.

JOSEPH D. POLICANO
East Hampton, N.Y.

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POST-CANA REALITIES

Peter Feuerherd

If the pope were to look for source material for a new pastoral document on marriage, he could hardly do better than to view a tape of this season's final episode of "Malcolm in the Middle" on Fox television. Yes, the same network that brought us "Temptation Island" has delivered a treatise on the value of marriage, disguised, to the untutored, in the form of just another sitcom.

Marriage is in difficult straits these days. Some states in the South and Midwest are working to stem the high divorce rate by instituting premarriage education programs for couples. New York City residents have just survived a torrid season of tabloid headlines about the Rudy-Donna-Judith Gracie Mansion War of the Roses. But there is hope: "Malcolm" attracts 14.7 million viewers and is twenty-fourth among 198 prime-time network shows, an indication that celebrating marriage—even the zany couple featured in "Malcolm"—is still popular.

My wife and I love "Malcolm." One reason is that, in a medium where sex is often the exclusive province of sculpted unmarried twenty-somethings, "Malcolm" takes the bold assumption that middle-aged married people can still find each other irresistible. Amid the turmoil of raising four rowdy boys, the attraction between Lois and Hal, the couple featured on "Malcolm," endures.

"I love the way you tell the kids to go to bed," notes husband Hal with a leer to wife Lois in the final episode, as they wait—with realistic *angst*—for the results of a pregnancy test which could signal the expansion of their family to an even more unmanageable five children. Of course, being the man, Hal blames his wife for the potential pregnancy crisis, arguing that she is just too attractive.

The story line about four brothers,

narrated by the brainy middle child Malcolm, harkens back in some ways to my own childhood (I grew up among four brothers and a sister). Malcolm's mom enforces discipline and social conscience with an iron hand. Malcolm is told to spend time with a wheelchair-bound asthmatic classmate: "Now you are going to be friends with that crippled boy and you're going to like it, understood?" she orders.

Malcolm, played by Frankie Muniz, peers into the camera explaining his discomfort with his parents. "Just once I'd like to have a childhood memory I don't have to repress," he says.

The most appealing of the four brothers may well be Dewey, the youngest, played by Erik Per Sullivan. He reminds me of my younger brother Joe, now a writer/editor of upright professional standing but in his growing years the recipient of the kind of badgering, dependent upon the cruel exploitation of the innocence of the very young, that only older brothers know how to provide. We once concocted an entire fiction about Easter trees and Joe kept waiting expectantly one Palm Sunday for ours to appear.

Just about all the episodes of "Malcolm" have something to say about family life. Yet it's this past season's finale

in particular that ought to be studied by religious leaders and legislators attempting to stem the divorce rate.

Neither Hal nor Lois is happy about the possible pregnancy, although it provides a dramatic vehicle to review the births of their four sons (two of whom were delivered on the front lawn because of unforeseen circumstances). From behind closed doors, little Dewey hears their battle.

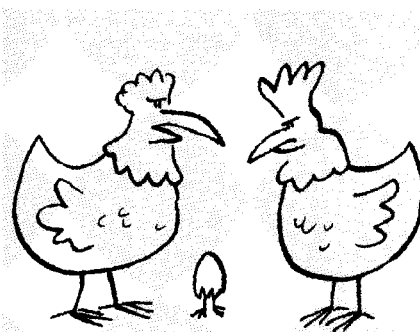
"Are Mom and Dad going to get a divorce?" he asks his older brothers. Don't worry, he's told, they will get over it and the end result will be a mushy reconciliation. That, warns Malcolm, can get pretty "disgusting."

Dewey's older brothers continue on their various paths of mayhem. Yet Dewey is distracted, concerned as the battle behind closed doors continues and he hears his parents become more and more agitated. His look reveals (is this too heavy a phrase for a Fox comedy?) a childhood existential anxiety indicating he no longer feels safe and secure.

Inevitably, the mushy conclusion occurs. Dewey is reassured and goes back to the mayhem fostered by his older brothers. Through Dewey's eyes we get a sense of what marriage can be. One large part of ongoing erotic marital attraction, when it is lived out to the fullest, is to assure the Deweys of the world that they are safe and secure.

To paraphrase a wise saying, I would rather write a nation's sitcoms than its laws. What "Malcolm" is saying about the value of the permanence in marriage is something that state legislatures and, for that matter, church documents, are trying to communicate with much less dramatic impact and certainly fewer laughs. □

Peter Feuerherd is a frequent Commonweal contributor.



"Oh, leave him alone and let him enjoy his childhood."

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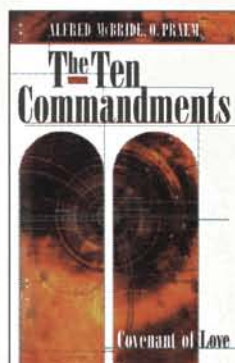


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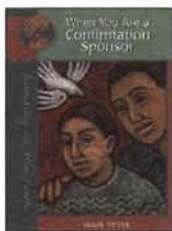


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